THRYMSKVITHA

The Lay of Thrym

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The *Thrymskvitha* is found only in the *Codex Regius*, where it follows the *Lokasenna*. Snorri does not quote from it, nor, rather oddly, does the story occur in the *Prose Edda*.

Artistically the *Thrymskvitha* is one of the best, as it is, next to the *Voluspo*, the most famous, of the entire collection. It has, indeed, been called "the finest ballad in the world," and not without some reason. Its swift, vigorous action, the sharpness of its characterization and the humor of the central situation combine to make it one of the most vivid short narrative poems ever composed. Of course we know nothing specific of its author, but there can be no question that he was a poet of extraordinary ability. The poem assumed its present form, most critics agree, somewhere about 900, and thus it is one of the oldest in the collection. It has been suggested, on the basis of stylistic similarity, that its author may also have composed the *Skirnismol*, and possibly *Baldrs Draumar*. There is also some resemblance between the *Thrymskvitha* and the *Lokasenna* (note, in this connection, Bugge's suggestion that the *Skirnismol* and the *Lokasenna* may have been by the same man), and it is not impossible that all four poems have a single authorship.

The *Thrymskvitha* has been preserved in excellent condition, without any serious gaps or interpolations. In striking contrast to many of the poems, it contains no prose narrative links, the story being told in narrative verse--a rare phenomenon in the poems of the *Edda*.

1. Wild was Vingthor | when he awoke,
And when his mighty | hammer he missed;

[1. *Vingthor* ("Thor the Hurler"): another name for Thor, equivalent to Vingnir (*Vafthruthnismol*, 51). Concerning Thor and his hammer, Mjollnir, cf. *Hymiskvitha*, *Lokasenna*, and *Harbarthsljoth*, *passim*. *Jorth*: Earth, Thor's mother, Othin being his father.]

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He shook his beard, | his hair was bristling,
As the son of Jorth | about him sought.

2. Hear now the speech | that first he spake:
"Harken, Loki, | and heed my words,
Nowhere on earth | is it known to man,
Nor in heaven above: | our hammer is stolen."

3. To the dwelling fair | of Freyja went they,
Hear now the speech | that first he spake:
"Wilt thou, Freyja, | thy feather-dress lend me,
That so my hammer | I may seek?"

Freyja spake:
4. "Thine should it be | though of silver bright,
And I would give it | though 'twere of gold."
Then Loki flew, | and the feather-dress whirred,
Till he left behind him | the home of the gods,
And reached at last | the realm of the giants.

[2. *Loki*: cf. *Lokasenna*, *passim*.

3. *Freyja*: Njorth's daughter, and sister of Freyr; cf. *Lokasenna*, introductory prose and note, also *Skirnismol*, introductory prose. Freyja's house was Sessrymnir ("Rich in Seats") built in Folkvang ("Field of the Folk"); cf. *Grimnismol*, 14. *Feather-dress*: this flying equipment of Freyja's is also used in the story of Thjazi, wherein Loki again borrows the "hawk's dress" of Freyja, this time to rescue Ithun; cf. *Harbarthsljoth*, 19 and note.

4. The manuscript and most editions have lines 1-2 in inverse order. Several editors assume a lacuna before line I, making a stanza out of the two conjectural lines (Bugge actually supplies them) and lines 1-2 of stanza 4. Thus they either make a separate stanza out of lines 3-5 or unite them in a six-line stanza with 5. The manuscript punctuation and capitalization--not {footnote p. 176} wholly trustworthy guides--indicate the stanza divisions as in this translation.]

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5. Thrym sat on a mound, | the giants' master,
Leashes of gold | he laid for his dogs,
And stroked and smoothed | the manes of his steeds.

Thrym spake:
6. "How fare the gods, | how fare the elves?
Why comst thou alone | to the giants' land?"

Loki spake:
"Ill fare the gods, | ill fare the elves!
Hast thou hidden | Hlorrithi's hammer?"

Thrym spake:
7. "I have hidden | Hlorrithi's hammer,
Eight miles down | deep in the earth;
And back again | shall no man bring it
If Freyja I win not | to be my wife."

8. Then Loki flew, | and the feather-dress whirred,
Till he left behind him | the home of the giants,

And reached at last | the realm of the gods.
There in the courtyard | Thor he met:
Hear now the speech | that first he spake:

[5. *Thrym*: a frost-giant. Gering declares that this story of the theft of Thor's hammer symbolizes the fact that thunderstorms rarely occur in winter.

6. Line 1: cf. *Voluspo*, 48, 1. The manuscript does not indicate Loki as the speaker of lines 3-4. *Hlorrithi*: Thor.

7. No superscription in the manuscript. Vigfusson made up {footnote p. 177} and inserted lines like "Then spake Loki the son of Laufey" whenever he thought they would be useful.]

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9. "Hast thou found tidings | as well as trouble?
Thy news in the air | shalt thou utter now;
Oft doth the sitter | his story forget,
And lies he speaks | who lays himself down."

Loki spake:
I0. "Trouble I have, | and tidings as well:
Thrym, king of the giants, | keeps thy hammer,
And back again | shall no man bring it
If Freyja he wins not | to be his wife."

11. Freyja the fair | then went they to find
Hear now the speech | that first he spake:
"Bind on, Freyja, | the bridal veil,
For we two must haste | to the giants' home."

12. Wrathful was Freyja, | and fiercely she snorted,
And the dwelling great | of the gods was shaken,
And burst was the mighty | Brisings' necklace:
"Most lustful indeed | should I look to all
If I journeyed with thee | to the giants' home."

[9. The manuscript marks line 2, instead of line I, as the beginning of a stanza, which has caused editors some confusion in grouping the lines of stanzas 8 and 9.

10. No superscription in the manuscript.

12. Many editors have rejected either line 2 or line s. Vigfusson inserts one of his own lines before line 4. *Brisings' necklace*: a marvelous necklace fashioned by the dwarfs, here called Brisings (i.e., "Twiners"); cf. *Lokasenna*, 20 and note.]

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13. Then were the gods | together met,
And the goddesses came | and council held,
And the far-famed ones | a plan would find,
How they might Hlorrithi's | hammer win.

14. Then Heimdall spake, | whitest of the gods,
Like the Wanes he knew | the future well:
"Bind we on Thor | the bridal veil,
Let him bear the mighty | Brisings' necklace;

15. "Keys around him | let there rattle,
And down to his knees | hang woman's dress;
With gems full broad | upon his breast,
And a pretty cap | to crown his head."

16. Then Thor the mighty | his answer made:
"Me would the gods | unmanly call
If I let bind | the bridal veil."

17. Then Loki spake, | the son of Laufey:
"Be silent, Thor, | and speak not thus;

[13. Lines 1-3 are identical with *Baldrs Draumar*, I, 1-3.

14. *Heimdall*: the phrase "whitest of the gods" suggests that Heimdall was the god of light as well as being the watchman. His wisdom was probably connected with his sleepless watching over all the worlds; cf. Lokasenna, 47 and note. On the Wanes Cf. *Voluspo*, 21 and note. They are not elsewhere spoken of as peculiarly gifted with knowledge of future events.

16. Possibly a line has been lost from this stanza.

17. *Laufey*: Loki's mother, cf. *Lokasenna*, 52 and note.]

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Else will the giants | in Asgarth dwell
If thy hammer is brought not | home to thee."

8. Then bound they on Thor | the bridal veil,
And next the mighty | Brisings' necklace.

19. Keys around him | let they rattle,
And down to his knees | hung woman's dress;
With gems full broad | upon his breast,
And a pretty cap | to crown his head.

20. Then Loki spake, | the son of Laufey:
"As thy maid-servant thither | I go with thee;
We two shall haste | to the giants' home."

21. Then home the goats | to the hall were driven,
They wrenched at the halters, | swift were they to run;
The mountains burst, | earth burned with fire,
And Othin's son | sought Jotunheim.

22. Then loud spake Thrym, | the giants' leader:
"Bestir ye, giants, | put straw on the benches;

[18-19. The manuscript abbreviates all six lines, giving only the initial letters of the words. The stanza division is thus arbitrary; some editors have made one stanza of the six lines, others have combined the last two lines of stanza 19 with stanza 20. It is possible that a couple of lines have been lost.

21. *Goats*: Thor's wagon was always drawn by goats; cf. *Hymiskvitha*, 38 and note. *Jotunheim*: the world of the giants.

22. *Njorth*: cf. *Voluspo*, 21, and *Grimnismol*, 11 and 16. *Noatun* {footnote p. 180} ("Ships'-Haven"): Njorth's home, where his wife, Skathi, found it impossible to stay; cf. *Grimnismol*, 11 and note.]

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Now Freyja they bring | to be my bride,
The daughter of Njorth | out of Noatun.

23. "Gold-horned cattle | go to my stables,
Jet-black oxen, | the giant's joy;
Many my gems, | and many my jewels,
Freyja alone | did I lack, methinks."

24. Early it was | to evening come,
And forth was borne | the beer for the giants;
Thor alone ate an ox, | and eight salmon,
All the dainties as well | that were set for the women;
And drank Sif's mate | three tuns of mead.

25. Then loud spake Thrym, | the giants' leader:
"Who ever saw bride | more keenly bite?
I ne'er saw bride | with a broader bite,
Nor a maiden who drank | more mead than this!"

26. Hard by there sat | the serving-maid wise,
So well she answered | the giant's words:
"From food has Freyja | eight nights fasted,
So hot was her longing | for Jotunheim."

[24. Grundtvig thinks this is all that is left of two stanzas describing Thor's supper. Some editors reject line 4. in line 3 the manuscript has "he," the reference being, of course, to Thor, on whose appetite cf. *Hymiskvitha*, 15. *Sif*: Thor's wife; cf. *Lokasenna*, note to introductory prose and stanza 53.]

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27. Thrym looked 'neath the veil, | for he longed to kiss,
But back he leaped | the length of the hall:
"Why are so fearful | the eyes of Freyja?
Fire, methinks, | from her eyes burns forth."

28. Hard by there sat | the serving-maid wise,
So well she answered | the giant's words:
"No sleep has Freyja | for eight nights found,
So hot was her longing | for Jotunheim."

29. Soon came the giant's | luckless sister,
Who feared not to ask | the bridal fee:
"From thy hands the rings | of red gold take,
If thou wouldst win | my willing love,
(My willing love | and welcome glad.)"

30: Then loud spake Thrym, | the giants' leader:
"Bring in the hammer | to hallow the bride;
On the maiden's knees | let Mjollnir lie,
That us both the band | of Vor may bless."

[27. For clearness I have inserted Thrym's name in place of the pronoun of the original. *Fire*: the noun is lacking in the manuscript; most editors have inserted it, however, following a late paper manuscript.

28. In the manuscript the whole stanza is abbreviated to initial letters, except for "sleep," "Freyja," and "found."

29. *Luckless*: so the manuscript, but many editors have altered the word "arma" to "aldna," meaning "old," to correspond with line 1 of stanza 32. Line 5 may well be spurious.

30. *Hallow*: just what this means is not clear, but there are {footnote po. 181} references to other kinds of consecration, though not of a bride, with the "sign of the hammer." According to Vigfusson, "the hammer was the holy sign with the heathens, answering to the cross of the Christians." In Snorri's story of Thor's resuscitation of his cooked goat (cf. *Hymiskvitha*, 38, note) the god "hallows" the goat with his hammer. One of the oldest runic signs, sup posed to have magic power, was named Thor's-hammer. *Vor*: the goddess of vows, particularly between men and women; Snorri lists a number of little-known goddesses similar to Vor, all of them apparently little more than names for Frigg.]

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31. The heart in the breast | of Hlorrithi laughed
When the hard-souled one | his hammer beheld;

First Thrym, the king | of the giants, he killed,
Then all the folk | of the giants he felled.

32. The giant's sister | old he slew,
She who had begged | the bridal fee;
A stroke she got | in the shilling's stead,
And for many rings | the might of the hammer.

33. And so his hammer | got Othin's son.

[33. Some editors reject this line, which, from a dramatic stand point, is certainly a pity. In the manuscript it begins with a capital letter, like: the opening of a new stanza.]

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